THE

EVIDENCE;

OR,

Religious and Moral Gazette.

RELIGION AND MORALITY ARE THE BASIS OF HUMAN FELICITY.

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Enquiry respecting Religious Awakenings.

WE reprobate and pity the heathen, who deify the works of man's device, and yet refuse to open our eyes and receive wisdom from the full blaze of Gospel light which environs us. In the scriptures the doctrines of God are before us in Golden capitals, but alas, we are prone to overlook their combined import, and entertain conceptions of the most material points which are essentially defective.

No small proportion of what is called the Christian world, and indeed of those who verbally acknowledge the divine authenticity of the scriptures, are, nevertheless, disaffected with humiliating truths, and opposed to that economy, the Lord has manifestly adopted, and is pursuing in the salvation of sinners.

THIS class of nominal believers has but a very indifferent opinion of what is called experimental relinion. Religious awakenings, which of late have been very freequent, in different parts of the enlightened world, they deem the result of a heated imagination, rather than the fruit of a special operation of the divine spirit. Men of this description, at least many of them, would fain be considered too philosophical to condescend to notions, which they view fit only for the weak, the timid and the irresolute.

THEY consider religion as a good thing in society, and if they are honest in their dealings, and generally decent in their manners, they shall unquestionably receive at last the reward of the faithful. The fact is, there is a serious division of sentiment in the Christian world,. Not a division about modes and forms, not a division which exists between sectaries,but a division about a matter of experience. The point contested is, whether awakenings, consisting in what is termed conviction and conversion, are a solemn reality, and an evident fruit of divine influence. Some of almost all denominations of Christians are upon one side of this question, and some upon the other. It is a matter extremely desirable to be correct upon this subject. To ascribe that to God which is fanciful or hypocritical must be an awful affrontry against his holy majesty ; and on the other hand to be found fighters against God, is that, at which we must recoil, if we have the least sensibility respecting our future and eternal safety.

To silence the gainsayer who is wont to speak evil, may never be expecteds o long as sinful minds are unrestrained; and yet to bring the matter to the test, so as to form a correct opinion is by no means beyond

what we may anticipate in the research.

That there may be, and in fact are counterfeits of that which is real, we know to be a truth generally. The best things are resembled by false appearances, and sometimes the similitude approaches so nearly to the thing represented as to require very nice inspection to discover the falacy.

But whether awakings are a work of God, or the mere fruit of accident or passion is capable of a certain and infallible decision. To guide and settle our minds upon this point we have two sources from which to draw our conclusions, viz. God's unerring word, and facts which are continually transpiring under his governing providence.

The perfect coincidence between scripture and fact is a basis on which we may found our judgment with little liability of being under the necessity of changing our sentiments in future. That conviction and conversion, or the awakings of the present day, which take place in view of the truth, as it is in Jesus, of which we have so many accounts in our religious miscellanies are the work of God, will obviously appear from scripture, from the analogy of what passes before us in the natural world and from the fruits of such awakenings. If awakenings are not corsespondent with God's word, or if they were unlike God as he shows himself in his providence, or if they were attended with no salutary effects as respects church and society, then we might well suppose, they are from an impure source. But if they have the weight of argument in their favor, if they are evidenced philosophically and from fact, as well as from scripture testimony, then the candid mind will be under the necessity of ascribing them to God.

The scriptures are by no means silent on the subject of awakenings. They abound with accounts of real conversion to God, which was preceded by awakenings, and a deep sense of the ruins of sin. This was strikingly true with the three thousand Jews, which were converted on the day of Pentacost. On hearing the truth as it is in Christ they were pricked to the heart. These were Jews who had been reputed serious, though not truly religious. They had been devout men, and yet mistaken in their worship. It pleased God, through the instrumentality of Peter to discover to them their guilt and danger; which was no sooner done than they cried out men and brethren what shall we do? They were directed to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus, and the same day they were joined to his kingdom. The account given us of the Jailor shews us that he was convicted of his own ruined state by nature, thrown into distress about his soul, and through grace found peace in believing. It is true God has not in every, nor indeed in most, instances, left on record the particular exercises of those, who were converted, while under conviction. The Apostles however in addressing the churches of Christ frequently made mention of their former state of moral death and ruin and compares it with their state of life and union with Christ, which clearly implied awakening, conviction of sin, and conversion to God.

Paul gives us the particular exercises of his mind from first to last. He tells what were his views while a stupid Pharisee, what they were when made acquainted with his own heart, and what after his conversion. The change he experienced he at

tributed to the special grace of God, as he expressly declares; "Gal. 1. 15. But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, &c," Scripture representation perfectly corresponds with the religious awakenings which are so abundant in these days. But it is not to be supposed that this will be satisfactory to those who have been in the habit of representing awakenings as visionary and unworthy of being ascribed to God. They would suppose, that religion is acquired by the gradual adoption of what they would call virtuous habits, that it is gained without any special awakening and conviction of our own sinfulness by nature, and that those who think differently from them are somehow misled by false appearances, or, a wrong association of ideas on the subject.

It is incumbent to show in reply to objections of this nature, that the work of God, which consists in conviction and conversion is as philosophically true, as it is consonant with scripture representation. It is often said, and by people who are entitled to some share of reputation for decency and steadiness, when an awakening takes place, that no good can come from it, but evil, that after a little while it will all be gone, the fire will die away, and things again fall into their old train. They conceive such religious stirs, as more usually they are of short continuance, to be enthusiastic, and by no means to be credited as effects of divine operation.

Those who thus feel and speak, wou'd do well to exercise peculiar caution last they should, unawares, fall into condemnation.

It is admitted, that religious awakenings are generally of very limited duration, and are succeeded by declension in zeal and fervency; but on this account, is our belief that they are really from God to be weakened? Are we to conceive of religious revivals to be merely the fruit of human effort or weakness, when God instructs us in his word and by analogy tells us what they resemble? In the Psalm 72 it is said, that he, that is Christ, "shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, and like showers that water the earth." There can be no reference in this passage to Christ's becoming incarnate, nor to his second appearance in the cloud of heaven. The words by no means apply to either of these appearances of the Messiah, but to the reviving influences of his grace. Christ is the cause of all religious awakenings, and when he is pleased to make his gracious descent, it is like rain and showers of rain. It is necessary to keep in mind this figurative representation, for it is full of instruction to us on a matter which lies between God and ourselves, and in which we are most deeply interested. And how is it with rain and showers of rain? They are refreshing, though usually of short duration. There may be a copious shower in the space of a few minutes. After the heavens, for a long time, have been as brass, and the thirsty ground parched with drought, is it not highly gratifying to see the clouds collect and distil abundance of waters! And is not the goodness of God in his governing providence, in this, very apparent? and would it not argue the height of ingratitude, and the completest destitution of sensibility, to sport with this common gift of heaven, and undervalue it as of no use because it would presently cease raining, and some time or other the earth be dry again. We might as as well reply against God in his

common providence, because the showers of his bounty do not constantly flow as against revivals of religion because they are of limited duration. Religious awakenings are evidently like God as he is shewing himself in the government of the natural world. After a severe drought, we very well know the effects of plentiful rain on the earth. It causes the withered plants to revive. It nourishes every green thing that hath life. Exactly similar it is with the showers of God's grace in the revival of his work. The people of God in whom is some remainder of spiritual life, give the first signs of refreshment from him. This is manifested by an uncommon union and ardor in the duty of prayer. After a refreshing rain, we observe not only the old plants instantly assume a more beautiful appearance, but new ones here and there shoot up and promise a richer harvest. So it is in seasons of religious awakening, the vineyard of the Lord is enriched with heavenly dew, and new born sons and daughters make glad the city of our God. In seasons like this the church of Christ being enlarged, puts on her beavtiful attire ; and though a spiritual drought may succeed, yet these new plants will never loose all their life. God will not utterly discontinue to water them, they will be nourished and made to bear fruit, some thirty, some sixty and an hundred fold.

In the showers of rain God shows his sovereignty. He who gives not account of his matters, he goes where he pleases with the clouds. He rains on one city and passes by another. After the same manner it is with the showers of his grace. In these he proves his right to do what he will with his own. For showers of rain to water the earth we are absolutely dependent, and so we are for the influences of the divine spirit. The work of awakening and renewing men, is not effected by human endeavors. It is made our duty to use means, but salvation is wholly of the Lord. It is obvious hence, that religious awakening with which so many places are favored, bear the strictest analogy to the events which are taking place under divine previdence, and from the fruits resulting are evidently to be ascribed to God.

Let it be recollected and borne in mind, that the common objection raised against awakenings, that they will soon be over and gone, lies with equal force against divine providence. If they are attended with real reformation of life, if in such sersons some of the vile are made prayerful and humble ; if the church of Christ hereby is increased and the hands of the faithful strengthened, and especially, if they are according to unerring inspiration, let none be so unwise as to undervrlue and despise the richest of all blessings, lest haply they be found to fight against God. From a combined view of truth, as God is revealing it, nothing can be more evident, than that awakings which prevail in the light of truth, are the effects of divine operation ; that they will multiply we have every reason to hope and believe, and that in these revivals God is giving us an earnest of the ushering in of that bright and glorious period of religious prosperity, when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest. That awakenings might be multiplied let prayer be made. Let the petition of Habakkuk become the ardent request af all who bow the knee to the God of all grace. "O Lord revive the work in the mindst of the years, in the midst of the years make known and in wrath remember mercy.

Berean.

"*And immediately the Cock crew.*"

THERE is no person, however he may be sunk in the depth of wickedness, that at all times is destitute of reflection. There certainly are moments when the most abandoned will feel compunction for their conduct and if it were possible, wish to hide themselves from the torment of their own consciences.—It appears that Peter was awakened to a true sense of his guilt, by the strict fulfilment of one of our Saviour's prophecies concerning him. "*I tell thee Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before thou shalt deny that thou knowest me.*". Notwithstanding Peter's protestation of everlasting fidelity, yet he soon found the fallacy of his arguments, and the weakness of his faith; for he was tempted by a fond love of life to deny the heavenly ma ter whom he served. "*And immediately while he was yet speaking the cock crew.*" Altho' we have not the crowing of the cock sounding in our ears for every act of wickedness, yet we have an inward monitor which will never fail to reproach us with every breach of duty, and with every act which is not conformable to the unerring line of uprightness.—This monitor if duly heeded will be the same to us as the crowing of the cock was to Peter. It will serve to awakening us from the stupifying influence of sin, bring us to sincere repentance for the past, and warn us to be more cautious for time to come. I do not suppose there is any of my readers who have got to such a height of wickedness as to say, they are not reminded by their inward monitor of the slightest transgression. When any one grows so hardened in iniqnity as not to feel any compunction for repeated acts of wickedness, their case is desparate indeed; and I should think, "*It were better for that man, had he never been born.*"

Portland Gazette.

Sketch of the character of a Christian.

THE true Christian feels that he is the object of God's love, and whilst he marks, and acknowledges with thankigiving, his own daily experience of it in the providential care of his heavenly Father, he perpetually looks with heart felt rapture, gratitude, and adoration to the transcendant display of it in the redemption of the world from sin and misery, by the gift of his only Son, Hence the love of God animates the soul, and becomes the governing principle of all his actions; and he demonstrates the force of it, by love to all his fellow creatures. He beholds with steadfast eyes, the high reward of glory and immortality with Christ in heaven, promised to faith and obedience; and whilst he knows the imperfection of his best services, and wholly renounces all reliance upon them, as any ground of claim to eternal life, he labors incessantly to render them more perfect, as if his salvation solely depended upon the success of his own endeavors. He therefore gives all diligence to "make his calling and election sure," ever striving to "add to his faith virtue, and to viutue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." Sensible at the same time, that all spiritual graces are the gift of God, without whose assistance he is unable of himself to will or to do any thing that is good, he prays for them with earnestness, peruses the Scriptures with dili-

gence, and hears the preaching of the word with deep attention, humbly beseeching God, for Christ's sake, to enlighten his understanding, and purify his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the conformity of his life to that of his Saviour, he looks for the evidence of his faith in him, comparing his conduct with the precepts in the New Testament, and with the example of his divine Master, as the only sure test by which to judge of that conformity.

Meek, humble, courteous, patient, and forbearing, deeply conscious of the natural depravity of the human heart, and of its proneness to evil, he examines all its thoughts and suggestions with scrupulous severity, proves the motives of his actions, and endeavers to subjugate his appetites, passions, desires, and affections to the law of God, which he constantly studies. Notwithstanding his vigilance to avoid giving offence to God or man, he still feels the daily necessity of imploring the pardon and mercy of his creator, through the meditation of his Son Jesus Christ, and humbles himself in deep repentance before him. He is at the same time charitable in judging his neighbors, and cautious lest he should inadvertantly publish their faults or follies. But he knows the duty of a Christian, and the obligation of the law of charity, too well, to withhold admonition and reproofs on just and proper occasons, and he imparts them in the spirit of brotherly love. In all his conversation with mankind, it is his object to edify by the purity of his discourse, and the propriety of his example; he is not only careful to abstain from evil, but to avoid the least appearance of it, lest he should unwarily mislead his brother, and become a scandal to his high profession. To the fatherless he is a father, to the afflicted a comforter, and as far as his means allow, a merciful dispenser of the bounties of God to the poor and needy. That means may not be wanting for this purpose, he considers a just economy to be a duty of strict obligation.

Is the Christian a husband and a father? he reflects upon the obligations, which these relations impose, and studies anxiously to discharge them with fidelity. His marriage vow, to love and cherish" the partner whom God has assigned to him is ever present to his thoughts. He appropriates and applies to his situation, the apostolic injunction, "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," and he exemplifies the doctrine conveyed in it, by the invariable kindness of his own demeanor. As a father, he deems it his first duty to train up his children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. He is sedulous in instructing them, constant in his admonitions, mild in his reproofs, and merciful in his chastisements, at all times studious to enforce his precepts by his own example, and whilst he requires from them the reverence and respect due to parental authority, he never fails to recollect the injunction of the Almighty, in his appeal by the mouth of the prophet to the Israelites, "If I then be a father, where is mine honor, saith the Lord of Hosts." As a master, the Christian is kind, forbearing, just, and considerate; temperate in his commands, but conscientiously steady in enforcing the observance of them; nor severe in marking the faults of his servants, nor careless in duly reprehending them, always remembering that he also has a master in heaven. He feels it his duty to instruct them, to watch over their

conduct, to reprove and check any immorality in it, and avoid placing them in situations of temptation, and to set them an example of sobriety, temperance, and orderly behaviour, under an awful sense of the responsibility attached to his influence and power over them. As a servant the Christian is faithful and obedient to his master in all things, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart fearing God; accommodating to his fellow servants, and ready to assist them in any emergency; unassuming and contented in his present condition, having his thoughts fixed on a better world. As a member of society, he primarily considers the duties of that station in which it hath pleased God to place him, and and labors to discharge them faithfully: he also considers in what manner his talents can be best employed for the good of the public or of individuals, and he cheerfully resigns a portion of his ease and comforts, in order to promote these ends.

The Christian examines and weighs the customs of the world by the unerring rule of the word of God. He is careful to avoid any singularity in his dress and behaviour, or in matters of an indifferent nature. But he is still more careful to adopt only such customs as are innocent. By the same rule, he regulates both the quality and and quantity of his amusements, and whilst he rejects all that have the remotest tendency to inflame the passions, or corrupt the heart, he extends his exclusion to others which are often erroneously deemed innocent, because he sees the tendency of them to be to weaken his spiritual affections, alienate the heart from God, and occasion a loss of time which can never be retrieved; ever remembering the warning parable, that whilst the husbandman slept, the enemy sowed tares among the wheat. Time indeed he considers as the most important of all his possessions; and he therefore husbands it with jealous care.

In looking over the Christian world, he laments the various divisions and schisms which prevail in it, but still more the animosities subsisting among those who profess to follow the same Lord and master; and his daily prayer to God is, that all believers in Christ may hold the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

"It is my meat and drink to do the will of my heavenly Father," is a saying always present to the view of the true Christian. God in Christ is the object of his love, his all in all; and to promote His glory the unceasing effort of his whole life. Grateful in prosperity, resigned in adversity, praising and blessing God for what he bestows, withholds, or inflicts; he walks thro' the world by the light of faith, with his eyes fixed on the prospect of that eternal home, where sorrow can never enter, and from which joy shall never depart.

Christian Observer.

ANECDOTE

Of Dr. Beattie and his Son.

It is much to be desired (observes one) that in lessons to child-

ren, matters of fact, and examples taken from visible objects, should be made use of. This wise method of instruction was, perhaps, never more forcibly and more usefully employed, than in the following instance of Dr. Beattie's son. The Doctor, speaking of his son, thus observes; He had reached his fifth or sixth year, knew the alphabet, and could read a little; but had received no particular information with respect to the author of his being. ing. In a corner of a little garden, without informing any person of the cirnumstance, I wrote in the mould with my finger, the three initials of his name, and sowing garden cresses in the furrows, covered up the seed, and smoothed the ground. Ten days after he came running to me, and with astonishment in his countenance, told me that his name was growing in the garden I laughed at the report and seemed inclined to disregard it; but he insisted on my going to see what had happened. "Yes," said I, carelessly on coming to the spot, "I see it is so:" "But what is there in this worth notice; is it not mere chance?" and I went away. He followed me, and taking hold of my coat, said with some earnestness, "It could not be mere chance, for that somebody must have contrived matters so as to produce it."

"So you think," said I, "that which appears so regular as the letters of your name, cannot be by chance?" "Yes," said he, with firmness, "I think so." "Look at yourself," I replied, "consider your hands and fingers, your legs and feet, and other limbs; are they not regular in their appearance and useful to you?" He said they were. "Come you then hither," said I, "by chance?" "No," he answered, "that cannot be, something must have made me." "And who is that something?" I asked. He said, "I don't know." I had now gained the point I aimed at, and saw that his reason taught him (though he could not express it) that what begins to be must have a cause; and that what is formed with regularity, must have an intelligent cause. I therefore told him the name of the great Being, who made him and all the world, concerning whose adorable nature, I gave him such information as I thought he could in some measure comprehend, The lesson affected him greatly, and he never forgot either it, or the circumstance that introduced it.

Anecdotes of Children and Young Persons.

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